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ABSTRACT

During a 16-day examination of recent innovations in Iranian education, two institutions were most closely examined: 1) The Army of Knowledge was created in 1962 as a crash program concentrating mainly on the elementary and secondary education of rural and village children where the population is dispersed, living standards low, and four out of five adults illiterate. Conscripted men who are secondary school graduates but have not entered the university may enter the Army of Knowledge for four months basic military and pedagogical training before being sent to a village for 14 months of teaching and community activities; then if they volunteer to become regular teachers they receive four months teachers college training and often return to the same village. 2) The National Committee on Literacy concentrates on teaching adults in towns and cities. The part-time teachers, secondary school graduates drawn from a variety of occupations, take a course (twenty-two 2-hour lessons) in the method of teaching adults to read, write, and do simple arithmetic. Then the teacher recruits his own sutdents (20-40) and is paid partly on the basis of how well they do on examinations at the end of two 6-month courses. The national illiteracy rate has been lowered since 1963 from 80 percent to 50 percent. (Administration of the two programs i s briefly described. Included are notes on the "White Revolution," the general economic and social change movement, and on the authors' itinerary and other projects visited.) (JS)

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THE WHITE REVOLUTION IN IRANIAN EDUCATION

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by

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January, 1970

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FOREWORD

I am glad that I was able to begin the arrangements which led to the invitation to Dr. and Mrs. Carr to visit my country and to see at first hand the new ideas in education that are being attempted in Iran under the leadership of H.I.M., the Shahanshah Aryamehr.

Our visitors are well known to thousands of teachers throughout the world. In the 1940's Dr. Carr was active in developing the idea of international post-war cooperation in education. This initiative led to the provisions for educational cooperation in the United Nations Charter.

As Secretary-General of the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession since 1946 he has developed active programs of cooperation among the national teachers' organizations of the world.

Dr. Carr was one of the architects of UNESCO when it was established in London in 1945. He currently serves as a member of the UNESCO Liaison Consultative Committee on Literacy of which Her Imperial Highness, the Princess Ashraf Pahlavi. is the Chairman.

The observations on certain new aspects of Iranian education, as published in this WCOTP Occasional Paper, should be informative and helpful to teachers, school officials, and others, not only in Iran, but also in many other parts of the world.

Mohammad Derakhshesh

I. NEW IDEAS FROM AN ANCIENT LAND

In May 1969, as guests of the National Committee on Literacy of Iran we spent an extremely busy 16 days learning all we could about some of the innovations in education that have been developed recently in that country. This Occasional Paper records some impressions from that experience.

The idea for our visit originated in a conversation with Mr. Mohammad Derakhshesh, the chief delegate from Iran at the 1968 meeting of the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession in Dublin.

We intend to describe these two institutions which have recently been developed: (1) the "Army of Knowledge", and (2) the National Committee on Literacy.

Before we begin these descriptions, however, a few general observations may be in order.

All the land in Iran was formerly owned, in feudal style, by about 1000 families. The major economic reform of the present day is land for the peasants, together with cooperative marketing and improved agriculture. The funds provided to recompense the former large landowners are invested in Iranian industrial development. The descriptive term, "White Revolution" has been used to describe the complex economic and social changes which have marked Iranian history in the past quarter century.

Iran is now working on its fourth Development Plan which covers the years 1968 to 1972.

The key economic objective of the Fourth Plan is an annual growth of 8 per cent in the gross national product (GNP). Per capita income under the Plan is expected to rise from $240 U.S. in 1968 to $320 U.S.

in 1972,- a one-third increase.

The World Bank has reported that among the 43 Asian countries, only eight have averaged an annual growth of GNP of seven per cent or more over the period from 1960 to 1967. They are: Hong Kong, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Taiwan, South Korea and Thailand. The GNP of Iran is now increasing about 14 per cent per year.

The Fourth Development Plan goes beyond economics. The highest priority among the social objectives is assigned to education. The Plan calls for the enrolment by 1972 of 92 per cent of the children of elementary school age in the cities and of 53 per cent of the rural children of elementary school age. The Plan also requires by 1972 a trebling of the number of students in vocational schools and a doubling of the number of university students.

Iran is now investing more than 4-1/2 per cent of GNP and 20 per cent of its national budget for education. In the last 20 years the enrolment in primary schools has increased twele-fold. For the first four grades of primary school free textbooks are now provided by the Imperial Organization for Social Security, a Foundation under the patronage of Princess Ashraf.

In religion about 98 per cent of the people are followers of Islam. However, there appears to be complete tolerance and freedom of religion for the small Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian minorities.

II. THE ARMY OF KNOWLEDGE

Iran is a large, thinly-populated country. A population of about 25 million people is spread over an area of 628,000 square miles. (For U.S. readers: this is an area almost equal to that of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California **combined,** but with about one fifth less population.) The country has nearly 50,000 small villages which contain almost three-fourths of the total population.

The "Army of Knowledge" was created in 1962 to deal with the educational aspects of such a situation where population was dispersed, living standards low, and four out of five adulte illiterate.

There is no effort in Iran to present the "Army of Knowledge" as a final or ideal educational procedure. It is frankly regarded as a "crash program" to meet an urgent national need in a hurry. On that basis it is clearly succeeding in its purpose. In conjunction with the work of the National Literacy Committee, the national rate of illiteracy has been lowered since 1962 from 80 per cent to 50 per cent and the proportion continues to decrease.

In Iran every able-bodied young man is subject to conscription for two years in the army. University students, however, may serve their military obligation after completing their university studies. Conscripted men who are secondary school graduates and who have not been able to enter the university are given the option of entering the "Army of Knowledge." Most of those thus qualified accept this opportunity.

These young men are given instruction for four months in basic military discipline and training, together with the rudiments of pedagogy, public health, agriculture, and law. At the end of this four-month period, the soldier is sent to a village, when possible to a village which he knows or in which he has lived. He serves the next 14 months of his military service in that village as the representative of the "Army of Knowledge." He remains in uniform, subject to military orders, and

could be called to other duties in the event of a national emergency.

In 1968 it was decided to assign a few young women, selected by lot, to the "Army of Knowledge." The young women have some military training and the same pedagogical training as the men in the "Army of Knowledge," and they are in uniform. At the time of our visit in May, 1969, there were some 2000 women in the corps of the "Army of Knowledge." We happened to see two of them at work. They appeared to be very eager and devoted.

There exists also a Health Corps and an Extension and Development Corps but in the time available we were unable to examine their work.

During its brief history the "Army of Knowledge" has also been known as the Education Corps and the Literacy Corps. Established in January 1963, the Corps numbered 7000 by 1964-65 and 31,000 in 1969. Its members are currently at work in some 20,000 villages. By 1972 the national plans call for the "Army of Knowledge" to have at least one representative in every village above 200 population.

A typical day for a man in the "Army of Knowledge" begins with raising the national flag in the village, followed by morning calisthenics and games for himself and as many members of the community as he can persuade to take part.

Then he teaches in the elementary school for a morning and afternoon session. This teaching is regarded as his primary task. In the evenings or late afternoons, however, he is expected to carry on such activity as:

organizing the village to build a road to market
building public bathhouses
enlarging the school facilities, including school gardens
administering first aid and teaching personal hygiene
developing small village libraries
persuading parents to send their children to school
organizing scout troops

teaching adults to read and write
organizing cooperative work for purposes of public health
repairing mosques.

The members of the "Army of Knowledge" are visited at intervals by representatives of the Ministries of Education, Health, Agriculture and Justice. For each 20 members of the "Army of Knowledge" there is one educational supervisor who is a graduate of the College of Education with not less than 5 years of practical teaching experience. The formation of village councils to work with the corpsmen is actively encouraged.

Although the letter of the law requires that all children attend school, there would be no school in many villages without the "Army of Knowledge." A detachment from the "Army of Knowledge" is sent to a village when it has been requested and after the village has arranged for a room or building in which a school can be convened.

At the end of their 14 months in the "Army of Knowledge" members may volunteer to become regular teachers in the Ministry of Education. Eighty per cent of those eligible to do so seek to enter the Ministry of Education. These men then spend 4 more months in the Teacher Training College in Karaj. After this training they usually return to the village in which they have previously worked.

The primary purpose of the "Army of Knowledge" is to work with children whereas the National Literacy Committee has the primary responsibility for working with adults. In practice this distinction is not completely maintained. By the end of 1969, the "Army of Knowledge" will have trained some six million adults in the three R's. Many children who are employed full-time can secure education, if they secure it at all, only in evening classes with adults. However, it seems accurate to say that the "Army of Knowledge" concentrates mainly on the elementary education of rural and village children, while the Committee on Literacy concentrates mainly on adults in the towns and cities.

III. NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON LITERACY

The National Literacy Committee under the immediate leadership of Princess Ashraf, has substantial responsibility in the education of adults. The program developed by the Committee runs approximately as follows:

Other than administrative personnel, there are no full-time employees of the Committee. The men and women who actually do the teaching are all part-time teachers, drawn from a wide variety of other occupations. They may be teachers in the regular elementary or secondary schools, they may be army officers, bank tellers, insurance salesmen, or any of a wide variety of occupations.

The teaching of adults in evening classes provides a source of supplemental income. Many observations do not suggest that this circumstance lessens the enthusiasm and vigor with which the program is promoted in the classroom.

To qualify as a teacher for adults, the applicant must have a secondary school diploma. He or she then enrolls in a class which offers 22 lessons of two hours each. The course is usually spread out over a period of 22 weeks. In these lessons "The Method" is taught. This is the approved method for teaching adults to read, write and do simple arithmetic. In addition, the prospective teacher of adults is taught how to maintain the interest and enthusiasm of his class and how to recruit his students in the first place.

Upon the completion of the training, the prospective teacher of adults is given a certificate showing that he is qualified to teach adults to read and write. He then begins what is at first perhaps the most difficult part of his entire career. He must recruit his own class. He may go to the market, to the coffeeshop, knock on doors, ask his friends, or proceed in any other manner that his ingenuity can suggest. Somehow or other he must round up at least 20 people who agree to

study in his class. If he can, he may enlist as many as 40 people; 20 is the minimum. When he is ready to begin, he applies to the director of a nearby school and is assigned a classroom for late afternoon or evening use. This appears to be the only important contact between the adult education program and the Ministry of Education. The director of the school has no responsibility for the adult program which occurs in the late afternoon and evening. The teacher of the adult education program has no responsibility except to return the classroom for its usual purposes without damage.

When the adult class has assembled for the first time and it can be seen that there are really at least 20 adults who are prepared to learn to read and write, a representative of the Committee gives the teacher his first paycheck. This payment is only part of what the teacher is entitled to receive. He will receive the rest of the pay, or part of it, when his students "graduate" at the end of the six-month period of instruction. Thus to receive full pay, he must hold the interest of the class, find means of helping them to attend regularly, and motivate their learning so that they can "pass" an examination supervised by representatives of the Literacy Committee. If all of the teacher's students pass the examination, full pay is given. If half fail, only one-half of the remaining pay is forthcoming.

This administrative technique has been tried sporadically in schools in England and in the United States and has been called "payment by results." It is not highly regarded by professional educators for reasons that are obvious. However, visits to 50 or more adult classes gave no indication of undue strain or pressure. After all, the greatest problem of the teacher of adults is to persuade them to come to class and persevere. The prospective adult student may say that he is too old, or he is too tired after a day of work, or her household duties are too numerous, or he tried once before and could not remember, or he may give many other excuses. The prospective teacher is taught in his 22 preparatory lessons how to deal with these objections and how to maintain interest. It is just as important to him to learn these lessons as it is to learn "the Method."

After the first six months an adult should be able to perform

simple arithmetic, write his own name and a few other words and to read simple printed matter. This is what the examination requires.

There is a second six-month program for adults who finish the first six-month program. In the second six-month program more difficult tasks are attempted, following the same general method and procedure. At the end of 12 months, assuming that the adult student has successfully passed the examinations, he receives a certificate. This certificate, when presented to his employer, requires that the employer increase his pay by 5%. An adult who has finished the 12-month program is said to be able, in the basic fundamentals of the 3 R's, to do work equivalent to that of a sixth grader.

We happened to be present in a class on the evening when the examiner was to test them and thus determine, in part, the teacher's compensation. It seemed to me that the students were determined to get as much money for their teacher as they could. An air of good feeling prevailed, not unlike commencement day used to be in an American college, but without many of the undesirable side effects associated nowadays with these academic functions. There was a simple party; the teacher had bought a cake and cut enough pieces so that everyone in the class could have a bite before undertaking the examination.

We noticed another thing in the classes visited. Not a single classroom, even in the cities, was without fresh cut flowers, usually three or four roses, on the teacher's desk. The teachers bring them or the pupils bring them without any particular sense of timing or responsibility. Most of the classrooms are dreary, often in bad repair, poorly lighted, their only equipment a battered wooden blackboard. There is something touching about this indomitable effort to bring beauty and grace into an otherwise rather drab environment.

The deputy director of the Committee's program said that 23,000 persons were working as teachers this year in the adult education program. The average number at work at any time was 14,500. This compares roughly with the estimates (16,000 teachers) given by Princess Ashraf in a press conference. The program for distribution of material to maintain skills already achieved involves about ten million books, including the free, or nearly free, textbooks and pamphlets which

are used in the classes. Four books have been developed for distribution to the graduates of the 12-month program.

Consideration is being given to further opportunities for adult learning beyond the 12 months.

In her press conference Princess Ashraf stated that the Committee was spending $12 per person on literacy classes for a six-month period. I asked the deputy director for a breakdown on that figure. He gave me the following estimates:

26 rials	**Teacher training**
400 rials	**Average salary of teachers**
100 rials	**Salary of the principal**
100 rials	**Salary for janitors**
90 rials	**Salary for supervisors**
25 rials	**Payment for classrooms (presumably for lighting and possibly some rent where classrooms were not available)**
25 rials	**Child care (to look after small children of women who are enrolled)**
90 rials	**Administration and supplies**
40 rials	**Miscellaneous expenses**
50 rials	**Books (difference between the very nominal price paid by the pupil and the actual cost of production)**
946 rials	
or about $12.00-(U.S.)	

The Deputy Director said that the government grant to the Literacy Committee for next year (1969-70) was reduced by 25 per cent below the previous year. In addition, he said, the Committee receives four per cent of the income from municipal taxes.

The Division of Evaluation forms part of the administrative apparatus of the National Literacy Committee. This division also has charge of textbook preparation and 15 people are constantly at work in that enterprise. The Director of Evaluation, who has a doctorate on Educational Measurement, told me that experiments are constantly underway to see if "The Method" can be improved. Other teaching methods had been tried but these were less successful. The method now used had been developed in Iran, originally for teaching children, and then

adapted to adults. An annual evaluation and a more intensive study every three years are made. As part of the intensive study, 2000 "graduates" from the program were interviewed in some depth to test the retention of recently learned skills. The "new literate" is asked a few questions; if he shows that he can read and write and give sensible answers, this is considered satisfactory. Misspelling is ignored. If the response is intelligible and rational, the graduate is judged to have retained the basic advantages of literacy.

The problem of removing illiteracy is not made easier by the characteristics of the Farsi language. It has 30 consonants and 6 vowels, each of which can be written in any of three ways, depending on whether it comes at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a word.

The Adult Literacy classes are held mainly in public school buildings in the late afternoon and evening. However, the place and time of the classes are adjusted to meet the needs of the students. For example in the hotel where we stayed in Esfahan a class was held in the early afternoon for employees of that hotel, including the dining room staff and others who would be at work during the evening hours.

On May 6, Princess Ashraf held a timely press conference which provided a useful summary of the work of the Committee on Literacy. The Princess said that during the past year more than one million persons had been drawn to literacy classes. As President of the National Committee on Literacy, she noted that during the past year 10 million books had been distributed among literates to maintain their skills. The Committee spends, she said, $12 per adult person in literacy classes for a six-month period, including tuition, books and administration. Other government agencies, she said, were spending an average of $40 per pupil. Two years ago the National Committee on Literacy raised about a quarter of a million dollars by a special lottery. The National Committee also receives assistance "from government and other sources." The Princess said that education of school-going children is the responsibility of the Minister of Education. She doubts whether illiteracy can be totally eradicated at once because "the Minister of Education is already short 15 million dollars which are needed to cut illiteracy off at its source." The Committee also faces a shortage of teachers, space and funds. "We have to rely on ourselves to raise the

necessary money, the Government has cut out appropriation by half!" There are 16,000 teachers at work under Committee auspices. The number of graduates during the 12-month period preceding this announcement was 166,000; "graduates" means persons who have finished two six-month courses.

An illustrated four-page leaflet appeared shortly after the Princess' press conference. It was designed to stimulate additional public interest in the literacy program.

The translation reads approximately as follows:

Page 1 "To advance our country we must first attain the goal of literacy" ....

His Imperial Majesty, the Shah of Iran.

Page 2 If you are an office worker, a housewife, a teacher, a policeman, a man or woman, whatever your occupation, **you** can help .....

Page 3 ... the literacy campaign by persuading an illiterate to enroll, participating in teaching the classes, providing classes for your employees, donating to the budget of the Literacy Committee, preparing in simple language an account of your own occupation for publication by the Literacy Committee under your name, visiting classes to encourage them, teaching sewing and cooking to new women literates.

Page 4 Over 150 local committees on literacy cover the entire country. With the supervision of these committees, and in cooperation with people like you, over a million citizens of Iran are involved. But reaching the goal which His Imperial Majesty has set (to eradicate illiteracy in 10 years) will require further effort. This is the sacred duty of every Iranian. Every person we make literate adds to the prosperity of the nation."

IV. NOTES ON THE ITINERARY AND OTHER VISITS

This final section summarizes our activities in Iran and refers to certain institutions which we visited only briefly.

We arrived at the Hilton Hotel, Teheran, slightly after midnight on Friday, May 2, 1969.

On Saturday, May 3 after calls on H.E. Assadollah Alam, minister of the Imperial Court, and on Dr. Parvis Khanlari, Director of the Committee on Literacy, we visited a number of classes for adult illiterates in various sections of Tehran.

On Sunday May 4 we took an early plane for Esfahan, arriving at the Shah Abbas Hotel there at 7 a.m. We spent the next three hours admiring the remarkable architectural beauties of this ancient capital city. In the afternoon and evening we visited adult literacy classes in Esfahan.

Monday, May 5, we visited nine classes conducted by the Army of Knowledge in three villages around Esfahan. We also visited the rural camp conducted by the Esfahan schools to give Esfahan children experience in healthful outdoor living. A forestation project is being developed by the students at this camp. In the afternoon one of us visited the literacy class for the employees of the Hotel, and then addressed a meeting of the local teachers at the school administration building. We were entertained at dinner that evening by the Governor of Esfahan and the local school officials.

On Tuesday, May 6, we visited the UNESCO Oriented Adult Literacy project in Esfahan. This enterprise was approved by the Iran Government, the United Nations Development Plan and UNESCO early in 1967. The UNESCO activities at Esfahan are described as a sub-project which includes three different areas: the teaching of handicrafts in Esfahan

itself together with a Training Center for group leaders, the teaching of industrial workers in the Reeze area, and agriculture teaching in a selected group of villages. The purpose of the project, we were informed, is not only to teach adults the elements of the three R's but also to provide the general cultural knowledge necessary for "the transformation of their society." The project is described as "experimental." The evaluative, supervisory, and administrative procedures are much more complex than is the case in the ordinary schools or in the classes operated by the National Literacy Committee. The cost for pupils under the UNESCO project is many times that in the other schools. There is some criticism of the UNESCO project on the ground that it serves so few and costs so much. We did not have sufficient time or background to make an independent evaluation of this criticism. UNESCO itself has an evaluation team which will meet in Iran to evaluate all the UNESCO literacy projects in that country.

At noon on May 6 we visited the Red Lion School and Boys Orphanage. This was a memorable experience. We found an institution where the director was endeavouring to develop self-confidence and responsibility among the students. There was a student police corps, a student mayor, a student bank, a student cooperative. Visits to the classrooms and shops indicated a high degree of student responsibility. We also had the pleasure of remaining at the Rod Lion School for lunch with the boys.

In the afternoon of May 6 there was a conference with the Director of the UNESCO projects in Esfahan.

Because of bad weather, air service between Esfahan and Teheran was interrupted on May 6 and we were unable to reach Teheran until almost noon on May 7. During this interim (and indeed during our entire visit in Esfahan) we were greatly assisted by the information supplied by the Director of Education for the area.

Shortly after we returned to Teheran, we were the luncheon guests of Princess Ashraf Pahlavi, who is the Chairman of the National Litteracy Committee and Chairman of the UNESCO Liaison Advisory Committee on Literacy Programs. There were two other guests,- Dr. Khanlari and a

representative of the Foreign Office.

On Thursday, May the 8th, we did our "sightseeing" in Teheran, visiting the Golestan Palace and the impressive display of the Crown Jewels.

On Saturday, May 10, the major part of the day was spent at the Narmak Technical Teachers College. This college, originally established in 1929, was substantially assisted in 1963 by United States AID funds. Its campus and programs have since been greatly expanded and diversified. The college gives an A.B. degree in vocational education and includes a demonstration technical high school. High school graduates with outstanding records in science and mathematics are admitted to the college after a difficult qualifying examination. About eight thousand students sat for the examination last year of whom only 1400 were admitted. The total enrolment, when the school was visited, was 2450 with plans to add 1000 more students every year for the next three years.

The primary goal of the college is to prepare teachers for the technical secondary schools of Iran in a four-year teacher training course. However, the technical training provided by the College is so highly prized that few of the graduates actually enter teaching. Many are employed by various industrial concerns who need their skills and abilities. The college has ten workshops which hold about 30 students each, four science laboratories and thirty classrooms as well as a science technological library with 1000 volumes in Persian, English, French and German. The campus is constantly being expanded by new construction, some of which is done by students as part of their practical training. The College also contains a well-equipped printing, binding and audio-visual shop where most of the work of preparing and assembling curriculum materials is done by the staff and the students.

In the late afternoon of May 10 one of us visited the National Teacher College and addressed the student body.

On Sunday, May 11, there was a very useful discussion with the Director-General of the "Army of Knowledge".

On Monday, May 12, one of us called on the Minister of Higher Enducation and on the Chancellor of the University of Teheran, visiting also some of the classrooms, the new physical science laboratory, and some of the new dormitories. Meanwhile, the other half of our expedition visited the Red Lion Orphanage in Teheran and the new Children's Hospital there.

On Tuesday, May 13, calls were made on the Deputy Minister of Education and the Chancellor of Aryamehr University.

On Wednesday, May 14, there were in the morning final farewell interviews with the Director, the Deputy Director, and the Director of Evaluation of the National Literacy Committee. In the afternoon, there was a meeting at the Teachers Club with groups of teachers representing the various subject matter areas of secondary education.

We left for Beirut by Iranian Airlines on the morning of Friday, May 16, with immense and lasting gratitude to our many old and new friends in Iran who had been so kind and helpful to us throughout our visit.